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Chairman: Mr. Argüello ..... (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Agenda item 32: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/63/21 and A/63/258)

1. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) commended the Department of Public Information for its innovative approach and for introducing self-analysis as a management tool in order to assess the effectiveness of its work. Recent events, including the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the commencement of peacekeeping operations and the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), testified to the increased effectiveness of the Department's work.

2. Since many people in developing countries lacked access to modern means of communication, traditional means should not be overlooked in disseminating the Organization's message. In that regard, United Nations information centres in developing countries played a key role and should not be closed without first consulting the host countries. Efforts should be made to close the digital gap between developed and developing countries and to establish a new world information and communication order, as called for in General Assembly resolution 34/182.

3. Finally, he called on the Department to continue its special information programme on Palestine until such time as a just solution to the question of Palestine was found.

4. **Mr. Badji** (Senegal) renewed his delegation's call for information that was accurate and balanced, and for parity in the use of the official languages, especially on the various websites. His delegation urged the Department to meet its translation needs by broadening its partnerships with Chinese, Russian and Spanish academic institutions, as doing so would have the added benefit of contributing to student awareness of the activities of the United Nations.

5. Any decisions to reorganize the United Nations information centres must be taken in close consultation with the host countries and must take into account the geographic and linguistic characteristics of the regions concerned. In that regard he recalled the initiative of the Senegalese authorities aimed at creating a regional United Nations information centre in Dakar to address the common concerns of the vast Francophone community.

6. While welcoming the various efforts made, in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations, to disseminate more accurate information about such operations, his delegation regretted the omission of the question of Palestine from the report of the Secretary-General. He urged the Department to intensify its efforts to implement its special information programme on the question of Palestine and invited all delegations to support, unconditionally, all recommendations and decisions regarding the Department's information programmes on that question.

7. Senegal firmly supported the conclusions contained in the report of the Committee on Information, and called for the traditional consensus on the relevant draft resolution in order to provide guidance to the Department in its work. There was also an urgent need for greater access to information technology on the part of the populations of the South; as a part of that effort, the Department should make more broadly known the importance of the Global Digital Solidarity Fund, an indispensable tool for narrowing the digital divide between North and South.

8. **Mr. Hosseini** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that to achieve its goal of promoting a just and more effective world information and communication order, the Committee on Information should increase its efforts to formulate an effective United Nations information policy aimed at ensuring greater understanding and respect among the peoples of different societies, cultures and religions. As the public voice of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information should continue its close cooperation with the Committee on Information.

9. While it appreciated the efforts made by the Department to publicize the work of the United Nations on a variety of issues, his delegation was of the view that the emergence of new issues should not distract attention from earlier issues of extreme importance such as that of Palestine. Continued effort by all United Nations bodies, especially the Department, to address all aspects of the question of Palestine should remain a top priority.

10. For many countries in the developing world, the digital divide and the lack of needed resources and equipment prevented access to timely and useful information about the work and activities of the United Nations. A concerted policy to bridge that divide, along

with an appropriate response to the financial and technical needs of developing countries in that regard, could help to strengthen the positive image of the United Nations in those countries and reduce the effects of the manipulated and monopolized media.

11. His delegation hoped that the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Department, could boost their efforts to assist developing countries address the challenge of the current unjust and inequitable media structure and serve as a fair and balanced voice for both developed and developing countries. The Department should continue to enhance its technological infrastructure in areas of public information and communications of special interest to developing countries.

12. The United Nations information centres were making valuable efforts to mobilize public opinion and convey information on United Nations activities to people in their host countries. Close consultation and coordination between the centres and the host countries, provision of new technologies to the centres, allocation of adequate resources, and careful attention to the geographic, cultural, social and economic characteristics of different regions were all important factors to be taken into account in that regard.

13. With regard to the proposed evolution of the *UN Chronicle* to a journal entitled *UN Affairs*, his delegation was of the view that once Member States' approval had been obtained, due consideration should be given to ensuring respect for multilingualism as well as a broader presentation of the work and activities of the United Nations by expanding the core audience for the periodical.

14. Finally, he expressed grave concern and dismay over a recent incident in which a Member State had used the United Nations premises to assist a body claiming to be a non-governmental organization to mount a biased and politically-motivated campaign against another Member State. He requested that the Secretary-General should take appropriate measures to prevent similar campaigns against Member States in the future.

15. **Mr. Mansour** (Tunisia) said that he was heartened that the Department's efforts to familiarize the peoples of the world with the work of the United Nations had led to a marked increase in the number of persons making use of the services available on the Organization's website. He was confident that the Department would give due attention to the question of parity among the six official languages of the United Nations.

16. Member States needed to enable the peoples of developing countries to benefit from the information revolution. In that connection, it was important to implement the recommendations contained in the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society that had been adopted at the Second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

17. His Government had continued to pursue policies aimed at delivering the benefits of information technology to all levels of Tunisian society and to encourage invention and creation through cooperation with the technological and scientific sectors of various of Member States. To that end, Tunisia was hosting the sixth session of Med-IT@Tunis, a trade fair aimed at strengthening cooperation between regional and international information technology institutions.

18. **Mr. Vidal** (Uruguay) said his Government had recently begun to implement an initiative, entitled the "Ceibal Plan", designed to promote digital inclusion and reduce the existing technological gap with respect to other countries and among its own citizens, while facilitating better access to education and culture.

19. Under the Plan, every student and teacher in the first through sixth grades would be given a portable computer, along with the requisite materials and skills training for teachers. It was hoped that the Plan would foster innovative use of computers within the classroom, teacher training, formation of learning communities and the participation of families and society at large. It was expected that the Plan would reach 350,000 children and teachers by 2009; eventually, the idea was to move beyond the school system so as to bring computer education and use to a broader audience, as an example of successful cooperation between the Government and civil society.

Agenda item 31: Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

20. **The Chairman** invited the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support to report on developments in the area of peacekeeping. The Under-Secretaries-General would be available at the close of

the meeting for an informal interactive dialogue with the members of the Committee.

21. **Mr. Le Roy** (Under-Secretary-General, for Peacekeeping Operations) said that peacekeeping operations played a central role in reducing the likelihood of future conflict and creating a framework in which normal development could resume. Some 110,000 United Nations peacekeeping staff were engaged in a wide range of activities across 18 current operations, 11 of which had been either deployed or strengthened in the previous five years. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) had been deployed during 2008, and those deployments were still ongoing.

22. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the mission was supporting political dialogue while providing security in the east. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was helping the Lebanese Armed Forces to extend State authority to and secure the south, in addition to undertaking mine action activities, as a result of which some 30,000 items of unexploded cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance had been cleared thus far. United Nations peacekeepers deployed as part of UNAMID were increasing the scope and frequency of patrolling so as to ensure the protection of civilians. In Côte d'Ivoire, the peacekeepers had advised the authorities and civil society on developing demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programmes and in southern Sudan, the mission was promoting local efforts to re-establish courts and rehabilitate correctional facilities.

23. The United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) had assisted national efforts to incorporate gender equality into national legislation and, in Burundi, the mission was working to strengthen national capacity to promote and protect human rights. In Liberia and in Haiti the missions were working with United Nations country teams to deliver integrated reconstruction and early recovery assistance. In Timor-Leste and Chad the missions were supporting local efforts to reform the armed forces and police and, finally, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) had recently assumed a lead role in coordinating international aid.

24. Progress on the political, security and reconstruction fronts remained sporadic and fragile for some missions, including UNAMID and UNAMA, while others would probably need a major infusion of support to maintain progress in the face of the devastation wrought by the global financial meltdown, the food crisis and recent hurricanes.

25. Despite the daily challenges of peacekeeping, the United Nations was helping to improve the lives of millions of people living in or emerging from brutal conflicts, an achievement which relied largely on the direct support of Member States and strong cooperation between them and the Secretariat. In that connection, he intended to pursue peacekeeping reform and restructuring in cooperation with the Department of Field Support, in order to deliver on the Peace Operations 2010 professionalization agenda.

26. The Peace Operations 2010 agenda laid out priority areas for strengthening peacekeeping at various levels. At the organizational level, coherence and integration continued to be reinforced through new business processes and joint decision-making structures, in addition to the establishment of integrating functions and shared resources. His Department had begun to receive positive feedback from missions on the support provided to them by the seven Integrated Operational Teams, or IOTs.

27. With regard to resources, the Office of Military Affairs was also being strengthened to respond more effectively to contemporary military peacekeeping needs. With the support of Member States, it should be fully staffed by the following summer, with enhanced capacity to coordinate the military components of peacekeeping operations and to liaise closely with troop-contributing countries.

28. The Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) had already had a qualitative impact upon the ability of field missions to provide more comprehensive support to national and international counterparts in the area of rule of law and security institutions. Such an integrated approach, aimed both at enhancing people's security in the short term and at laying the groundwork for longer-term peacebuilding, was needed in order to maximize the momentum for peace created by the deployment of a peacekeeping operation.

29. The Standing Police Capacity, an innovative tool capable of responding effectively to the diverse needs

of United Nations peacekeeping operations, had played a critical role in rapidly establishing the core police component of MINURCAT, also providing police advisers to Timor-Leste and Kosovo. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Office of Internal Oversight Services had recently called for a strategic review of the management of United Nations peacekeeping police, given its exponential growth in size and complexity. The Police Division's review would be shared with Member States the following year.

30. The Peacekeeping Group continued to give priority to identifying lessons and good practices. The Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training was developing practical guidance for staff and identifying innovative approaches to problems such as those faced by peacekeepers tasked with protecting civilians in conflict zones. Such guidance was all the more urgent given the adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in conflict. His Department was undertaking a number of initiatives aimed at reviewing current practice in that area.

31. Turning to the crucial issue of personnel, his Department continued to work towards ensuring that peacekeeping was able to attract and retain the most highly qualified and experienced candidates. To that end, he urged the Committee to approve the human rights reform proposals before it, also noting with appreciation the progress made by the Integrated Training Service in implementing the new Peacekeeping Training Strategy.

32. Sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations peacekeeping staff continued to bring great dishonour to the United Nations flag and to troop- and police-contributing countries and threatened to overshadow the generally positive impact of peacekeeping operations. While some progress had been made in combating the issue, much more remained to be done. Both the senior mission leadership and troop- and police-contributing countries must implement a zero-tolerance policy and treat the problem with the severity it deserved — both in its prevention and in investigations, prosecution and punishment, in accordance with due process. Member States must also inform his Department of any follow-up actions taken.

33. The United Nations Peacekeeping Group worked with an impressive array of partners ranging from United Nations agencies with programmatic expertise to the World Bank, and included bilateral national partners and humanitarian partners, all of whom complemented peacekeepers' efforts and facilitated achievement of their broad, multidimensional mandates. Effective cooperation in the field required a sustained approach that entailed mutual knowledge and concerted efforts to align structures, plans and programmes. He was therefore personally committed to leading a senior level group at Headquarters to provide leadership and oversight for United Nations integration in post-conflict contexts. His Department was also working with regional organizations and financial institutions to establish frameworks for predictable cooperation that encompassed coordinated planning and effective communication on participants' respective activities.

34. The demand for United Nations peacekeeping continued to grow ever wider, as did the scope of mandated mission tasks. At the same time — in Darfur, at least — his Department lacked the resources required to get the job done, and it was being tasked to work where there was clearly no peace to keep. Therefore, it would be necessary to consider how to address those demands more effectively in the context of the political, security, humanitarian and early recovery aspects of conflict resolution, and, most importantly, how to deal with the political and resource-related issues from which conflicts stemmed.

35. Despite the numerous challenges, peacekeeping was a sound investment for the international community. Not only did it bring stability and thereby lay the ground for economic revival, but it was far less costly than war.

36. It was obvious that the global financial crisis would have an impact on how the United Nations and Member States ensured accountability for how their money was spent. However, given the continuing demands made of his Department, peacekeeping budgets were unlikely to decrease. The Department was currently reviewing its activities in order to improve cost efficiency, and would report to the Committee in due course. Reporting on his recent visit to the Sudan, he noted that UNAMID faced great challenges as a result of slow troop deployment and lack of necessary resources. Committed peacekeepers in Darfur were struggling to achieve their mandate without the necessary equipment and logistical support and amid ongoing hostilities, underscoring the central

tenet of United Nations peacekeeping, namely, that there must be a peace to keep.

37. On a positive note, the Government of Sudan was increasing its cooperation with the Secretariat and UNAMID to facilitate the deployment of the mission. For its part, the Secretariat must strive for more rapid deployment than it had achieved thus far. His projection of 80 per cent of deployment being completed by March 2009 was a realistic one, given the enormous logistical challenges of deploying the mission to the centre of Africa. The applicable rules and regulations were totally ineffective to ensuring deployment of such magnitude and complexity, and would therefore have to be reviewed; to that end, he would work with the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, the Department of Management and the Member States to bring about the needed reforms.

38. In order to succeed, peacekeepers needed to operate in an environment where at least the main actors had acceded to a peace process and to the deployment of a peacekeeping force. While that had not been the case in Darfur thus far, he hoped that current efforts to revitalize the peace process would bear fruit.

39. UNAMID highlighted the widening gap between mandates and resources at that level of worldwide peace operations. Ways must be found to either secure more resources or scale down mandates and expectations. In an area as vast as Darfur, air transport was essential; without the air assets that had been requested of Member States, even a fully deployed UNAMID would not reach anywhere near its full impact. Barring advancements in the political process, a functioning ceasefire and the necessary resources, the mission would not fulfil its primary mandate of protecting civilians. His Department would also have to consider and be prepared to respond to the impact that the International Criminal Court proceedings against the Sudanese President might have on the capacity of its missions in Sudan to carry out their mandate.

40. The international community must consider how best to respond to the unfolding situation in Somalia and it must re-galvanize peacekeeping efforts. The security response must, however, be appropriate to the task. Since the military assessment was that a classic United Nations peacekeeping force would be insufficient, the Secretary-General was seeking Member State support for a multinational force to stabilize the capital. Other options included a peacekeeping operation as directed by the Security Council. It was, however, important to bear in mind the principles and limitations of United Nations peacekeeping, and the risk of outright failure should the wrong tool be applied.

41. The economic crisis was having a particularly destructive impact on the countries where peacekeeping missions were deployed, and where people already lived under terrible tension. As the head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti had remarked, a poor, hungry and desperate population was simply not compatible with stability. The international community must remain vigilant and must maintain a steadfast commitment to those vulnerable countries, in order to secure the gains made. It must also support efforts being made on the ground to sustain recent gains that United Nations peacekeepers had paid the ultimate sacrifice to achieve.

42. While peacekeeping had come a long way, in many areas, the Department was overstretched, with missions lacking the human, material and political resources to fully address all expectations. The Department would need, together with Member States and the Department of Field Support, to address important issues that had arisen as a result of the surge in peacekeeping demands. That might include a review of comparative advantages in the light of the changed political, economic and security environment; a streamlining of mandates to make better use of limited resources; a reassessment of peacekeeping mandates and identification of additional tools for conflict resolution; benchmarks for measuring success and preparing the transition to longer-term peacebuilding activities.

43. It would also be important to consider the relative roles and interoperability of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and other peacekeeping stakeholders; whether the United Nations had the right systems to grapple with the logistical challenges of rapid deployment into distant terrain; and, how the two Departments might garner sustainable political and diplomatic support from Member States.

44. Lastly, he paid tribute to the troops, police and civilians deployed to some of the most intimidating locations on earth, whose efforts made a difference

between life and death and who were sometimes called upon to pay the ultimate sacrifice.

45. **Ms. Malcorra** (Under-Secretary-General for Field Support), noting that she was responsible for shaping the Organization's newest Department and ensuring that it delivered on its mandate, said that it was important to achieve the right balance between strategic positioning and urgent operational demands. It was not enough to be able to deploy fast; the support model must be improved to ensure more effective and efficient delivery, whether in Darfur, Chad or elsewhere. Progress continued to be made on the Peace Operations 2010 reform agenda and the Department now better understood how to adjust to a changing environment that demanded growth despite insufficient resources. Although she would be able to make a strong case for the Department when she reported to Member States on results achieved to date, certain key indicators of progress would be missing, since insufficient time had elapsed since the Department's establishment.

46. It was critical to retain a strong management system and ensure that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support worked closely at all levels. While the Integrated Operational Teams had brought positive results, they required further strengthening. Her Department's responsibility was very broad, yet its mandate was beautifully focussed. It ensured that political discussions held elsewhere were fully informed by the realities on the ground. Supporting both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, its task was to devise a model that delivered quality service to both.

47. The operational priority was to ensure that all missions deployed quickly and efficiently; the most immediate priority was UNAMID. She had visited Darfur twice and would be returning soon. An agreement had been signed with the Government of Sudan and the African Union to remove all obstacles to rapid deployment, and regular meetings would be held to update it as appropriate. The second priority was MINURCAT; like UNAMID, it had similar deployment challenges across an extensive terrain. In Afghanistan, UNAMA was expanding in a very difficult security environment, while the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) required a strengthening of aviation capacity, as well as an expanded presence in the eastern part of the country. Somalia, meanwhile, posed huge logistical challenges and scenario planning was under way.

48. Sustainable teams were essential; however, without fairer conditions of service and fairer contracts for field staff, the issue of staff retention would not be resolved. The current vacancy rate of 25 per cent was unacceptable, and the situation was exacerbated by mounting security concerns.

49. A new support strategy must strike the right balance between effectiveness and efficiency; resources were not infinite. Given the demand for rapid deployment it was necessary to come up with more standardized solutions, as well as a more comprehensive social strategy that recognized the existence of local, regional and international markets. The short planning horizon called for a complete rethinking of the procurement model. To ensure long-term sustainability, capacities must be maximized, including in the field of information and communication technology (ICT).

50. The Organization's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse must not only be ingrained in the system, but fully shared by all Member States and enforced on the ground. Conduct and discipline teams had been established to that end in all missions and a victim assistance policy was being implemented with system-wide collaboration. A shared commitment was needed to ensure that the Organization did not repeatedly face the criticism that it was not doing enough to remedy matters. It was not a problem of the Secretariat alone.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.